

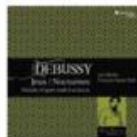
GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



HANDEL
 'Italian Cantatas'
 Sabine Devieille *sop*
 Lea Desandre *mez*
 Le Concert d'Astrée /
 Emmanuelle Haïm
 Erato
 ► **RICHARD WIGMORE'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 54**

This Handel recording offers some incredibly stylish singing, with music-making that, under Emmanuelle Haïm's excellent direction, has throughout a compelling theatricality.



DEBUSSY
 Orchestral Works
 Les Siècles /
 François-Xavier Roth
 Harmonia Mundi

A superb addition to Harmonia Mundi's fascinating Debussy survey, François-Xavier Roth and his period instrument players capturing the music's beauty and mystery.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**



MAHLER
 Symphony No 6
 MusicAeterna /
 Teodor Currentzis
 Sony Classical

Few conductors of late have generated such debate as Teodor Currentzis – his extraordinarily vivid approach to recording is just as thrilling here as in his recent *Patbétique*.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



DVOŘÁK
 Piano Trios Nos 3 & 4
 Christian Tetzlaff *vn*; Tanja Tetzlaff *vc*; Lars Vogt *pf*
 Ondine

An exquisite and entrancing chamber music disc, and an impressive example of the intimacy and interplay that the genre can embody at its most heightened.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



MESSIAEN
 La Nativité du Seigneur
 Richard Gowers *org*
 King's College, Cambridge

From the work's quiet beginnings through to the magnificent and magisterial final part, this is deeply impressive organ-playing, with Kings College's atmospheric sound expertly captured.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 91**



'BACH INSPIRATIONS'
 Thibaut Garcia *gtr*
 Erato

Guitarist Thibaut Garcia's instinctive-sounding command of colour and his graceful virtuosity offer an album at times moving and reflective, at others dramatic, all played with admirable skill and delicacy.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**



'THE BERLIN RECITAL'
 Yuja Wang *pf*
 DG

Yuja Wang is one of the most impressive pianists of her generation – extraordinary technique allied with imaginative musicality, she makes her second appearance on this page in as many months.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**



ELGAR
 The Music Makers.
 The Spirit of England
 BBC Symphony Orchestra
 / Sir Andrew Davis
 Chandos

With artists, and a record label in Chandos, all so steeped in repertoire such as this, it's no surprise that this album should be so powerful and so moving.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 101**



'PATER PECCAVI'
 The Marian Consort /
 Rory McCleery
 Delphian

Profiled by us earlier in the year, The Marian Consort under Rory McCleery bring the exquisite skill and elegance for which they've already become known to the music of late-Renaissance Portugal.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 112**



SAINT-SAËNS Ascanio Sols; Orchestra of the Geneva University of Music / Guillaume Tourniaire
 B Records

There's a real sense of delight in discovery as these musicians – players, chorus and soloists all excellent throughout – bring us this Saint-Saëns rarity.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 120**



DVD/BLU-RAY
PUCCINI Madama Butterfly
 Sols; Royal Opera / Sir Antonio Pappano
 Opus Arte

Mark Pullinger was deeply moved by this production, both in the opera house and now on screen, featuring the excellent Ermonela Jahò in the title role and one of today's leading Puccini conductors in the pit.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 119**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
WILHELM BACKHAUS
 HMW Recordings 1925-1937
 Wilhelm Backhaus *pf*
 APR

A chance to revel in the virtuosity of the young Wilhelm Backhaus, including the first complete Chopin *Études*.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 89**

In association with

 www.qobuz.com

Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at qobuz.com

scherzo-like second movement. But the interpretation itself is too soft-grained and often oddly tentative. Why are the music's seams so audibly exposed in the opening of that second movement, for example, and where's the *molto espressivo* in the violins' aching line at 6'38" in the first? The violins don't sound secure in the high-lying passage that opens the third movement, either, nor do they attack the *vigoroso* passage at 6'02" with sufficient verve.

Wilson and the orchestra are far more successful in *Connotations*, one of Copland's gnarliest works, composed for the opening of Philharmonic (now David Geffen) Hall at New York's Lincoln Center in 1962. Here, there's urgency and rhythmic vitality in abundance, yet the interpretation as a whole is more refined and varied than Bernstein's (available to download – Sony, 8/73). I find deep sadness in the searching passage at 3'11", dewy idealism at 11'10" and even a hint of real tragedy at 15'50". Some parts do still seem to meander, but I believe that's the composer's fault, and Wilson's performance is the most compelling and imaginative we've had yet.

The two miniatures arranged for chamber orchestra – *Letter from Home* (1944), originally composed for Paul Whiteman's band, and *Down a Country Lane* (1962), originally for piano – are attractive in a homespun way, and played here with poise and affection.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Symphony No 3 – selected comparisons:

New York PO, Bernstein (11/86) (DG) Ⓢ 419 170-2GH

St Louis SO, Slatkin (2/91) (RCA) Ⓢ RD60149

Detroit SO, Slatkin (8/17) (NAXOS) 8 559844

New York PO, Bernstein (SONY) Ⓢ SMK63155

LSO, Copland (EVER) EVERCD002

Debussy

Jeux. Marche écossaise sur un thème populaire (DVD only). *Nocturnes*.*

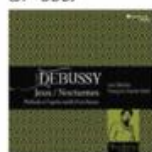
Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune

Les Cris de Paris; Les Siècles /

François-Xavier Roth

Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ (CD + DVD) HMM90 5291

(51 • DDD)



Released as part of Harmonia Mundi's Debussy centenary series, this superb disc from François-Xavier Roth and Les Siècles also to some extent continues Roth's exploration of music associated with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Nijinsky's notorious *L'après-midi d'un faune* ('Prélude' is omitted from the ballet's title) was first seen in May 1912. Debussy privately

admitted he found the choreography 'grotesque', but refrained from public comment as negotiations with Diaghilev for *Jeux* were already under way. He apparently considered the ambivalent *ménage à trois* scenario for the latter 'idiotic and unmusical', and only agreed to begin composition when Diaghilev doubled his fee. Once again he objected to Nijinsky's choreography, deeming it 'hideous', though the score, composed at breakneck speed in the summer of 1912, ranks among his greatest.

Both works are essentially about desire, and their sensuality is heightened here not only by their juxtaposition but by the dark warmth of Les Siècles' period-instrument sound and the restrained intensity of Roth's interpretations. Played by Marion Ralincourt on a 1900 Lot flute, the opening of *Faune* sounds very sultry, even husky, and the performance becomes really suggestive later on as the flutes sigh and moan over the principal string melody, before dying languidly away. So much has been written about the complex modernity of *Jeux*, meanwhile, that we tend to forget how closely Debussy adhered to Diaghilev's request that the score should be in essence a scherzo-cum-waltz.

Roth conducts it with an appealing lilt, immaculately judging its ebb and flow while remaining all the while alert to its constant changes in tempo. The sudden jolts out of triple time, suggesting the girls' jealous rivalry for the boy, are barbed and witty, and there's a real surge of passion at the climactic three-way embrace, marked 'violent' in the score.

It's a wonderfully persuasive performance, as is Roth's account of *Nocturnes* that follows it. 'Nuages', with its mournful cor anglais and drifting textures, sounds very disconsolate here. 'Fêtes', all garish brilliance and light, is played with terrific agility. 'Sirènes', meanwhile, is exceptionally beautiful, even serene, in its warmth and depth, and the women's voices from *Les Cris de Paris* are exquisitely integrated into the textures rather than seeming detached, as is sometimes the case. The recording, made in the Philharmonie de Paris in January, is finely engineered, though the close miking of Ralincourt in *Faune* captures some in-breaths and occasional key clatter.

The disc comes with a tremendous bonus DVD, co-produced by France Télévisions and Radio Nacional de España, of Roth and Les Siècles in concert during this year's International Festival of Music and Dance in Grenada. The programme is much the same, though *Faune* has been replaced by the *Marche écossaise sur un thème populaire*.

The Grenada *Jeux* is more relaxed than its Parisian counterpart, and the playing is, if anything, even more subtly refined. *Nocturnes*, in contrast, has greater urgency, particularly in 'Sirènes', which is altogether darker and more turbulent in mood on DVD than on disc. It's a wonderful issue and another outstanding addition to Harmonia Mundi's excellent series.

Tim Ashley

Debussy · Ligeti · R Strauss

Debussy Jeux Ligeti Melodien

R Strauss Schlagobers - Suite, Op 70a

Suisse Romande Orchestra / Jonathan Nott

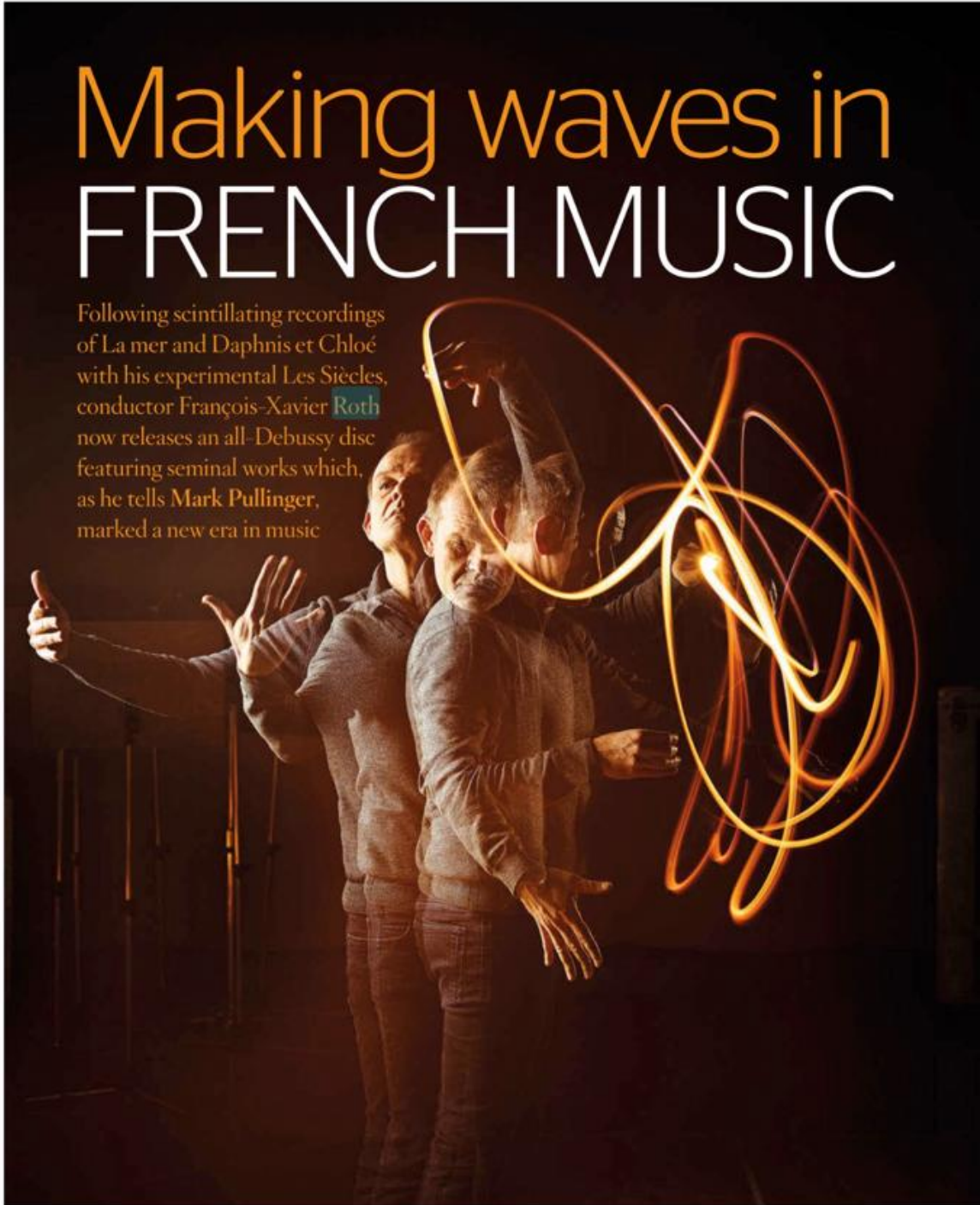
Pentatone Ⓢ PTC5186 721 (73 • DDD/DSO)



In 1941 Richard Strauss devised five suggested 'Programmes of my works'. Among them was a 'light programme' that included the *Schlagobers* Suite alongside such works as the *Schweigsame Frau* Potpourri and *Till Eulenspiegel*. One wonders what he'd have made, then, of this programme dreamt up by Jonathan Nott. The booklet note cleverly identifies certain 'elective affinities' between Strauss's score and the works by Debussy and Ligeti, but it's a shame we don't get to hear the conductor's own reasoning.

Either way, one can only welcome a new recording of the Suite from what must be Strauss's most maligned major work – a misguided 1924 ballet about frivolity and excess that a Vienna brought to its knees by hyperinflation found difficult to stomach. It's certainly not top-drawer music but shows Strauss in fluent, reasonably effective form. And this new, clear and light-footed recording helps to hide its excesses, with Nott (and Pentatone's engineers) preventing the work's arteries from clogging up. There's outstanding solo work, not least from the flute in the 'Dance of the Tea Leaves', and Nott's players make light work of the not inconsiderable challenges of the 'Leaping Dance' that follows the 'Dance of the Small Pralines' – such movement titles give an idea of the slightness of Strauss's own scenario.

In general it's better played and recorded than Neeme Järvi's Detroit recording (Chandos, 9/98), and more refined, if perhaps less theatrical, than Karl Anton Rickenbacher's account with the Bamberg Symphony (Koch Schwann, 12/01; Järvi includes an 'Introduction', incidentally, that is missing from both other recordings). This new account also has the advantage –



Making waves in FRENCH MUSIC

Following scintillating recordings of La mer and Daphnis et Chloé with his experimental Les Siècles, conductor François-Xavier Roth now releases an all-Debussy disc featuring seminal works which, as he tells Mark Pullinger, marked a new era in music



Picture the scene. It's May 2017, and in Cologne's Philharmonie the Gürzenich Orchestra has just closed a programme of music inspired by the sea. Conductor François-Xavier Roth takes a microphone and saunters across to a piano ... and proceeds to sing Charles Trenet's *La mer* as an encore, in a cheeky arrangement by Philipp Matthias Kaufmann which throws in splashes of Debussy's orchestral seascape.

Roth's timing was – unsurprisingly for this dapper Frenchman – impeccable. Two days earlier, Emmanuel Macron had fought off the far-right challenge from Marine Le Pen in the French presidential elections, and, as the conductor admits, it was with a huge sense of relief that he wanted to send out 'a nice, positive signal' to celebrate. 'In Cologne, they love French culture – food, songs – so it was my gift to them.'

Just two months later, Roth was created a chevalier of the *Légion d'honneur* in Macron's first Bastille Day honours list. It was conferred upon him this January by Françoise Nyssen of the French Ministry of Culture at Paris's space-age concert hall, the Philharmonie. The presentation followed a concert by his beloved orchestra, Les Siècles. I caught up with Roth during rehearsals for that concert to reflect upon his career and his probing approach to music-making.

'How can it be possible to propose a new perspective – for the listener to experience music they know already, but from different angles?'

Roth is now principal guest conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, but his relationship with them goes right back to 2000 when he won the Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition – a crucial breakthrough. 'This was very important for me because it was the beginning, not just because it was the first time I met the LSO and had an opportunity to conduct them, but because it was the first time I had even travelled to London! Can you imagine? I was a young musician arriving at Barbican tube station ... it took me hours to find the hall!'

'The competition was very important because suddenly I had confirmation that maybe I could really become a conductor. The management was very supportive in quite an old-fashioned way in not giving me too much, too soon. I didn't have 10 or 20 concerts, but instead I had the chance to keep learning, to be an assistant conductor, to observe, to shadow Sir Colin Davis and all the guest conductors like Pierre Boulez and Mariss Jansons. It was a great opportunity.'

Roth's burgeoning career took him to the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (as associate guest conductor), the Liège Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (music director) and the SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden and Freiburg as the orchestra's final principal conductor before it was controversially merged with the Stuttgart RSO to form the SWR Symphony Orchestra Stuttgart. 'It was a fight,' Roth admits, 'and I wouldn't accept the decision. I was totally against it. Unfortunately, we didn't win, but I had some wonderful years with them – we made great music together.' The partnership yielded a distinguished five-disc set of Strauss tone poems on Hänssler/SWR Music, but

Roth decided not to return after the merger because he'd been so against the decision. 'I had to stop my work with them much too early. It's a sadness, but that's life.'

Roth's new German orchestra, the Gürzenich, has a totally different heritage and culture. 'Cologne is a very musical city. It's not so German – in the sense that you are close to Holland, to France, to Belgium. It's an old musical institution with a great history. Berlioz, Brahms and Mahler all came here.' Indeed, Mahler premiered his Fifth Symphony with the Gürzenich in 1904, and Roth chose that work for their first disc together, an account David Gutman praised in these pages (3/18) for the freshness of its Scherzo and the 'hushed, virginal quality' of the *Adagietto*, taken almost as slowly as Leonard Bernstein's famous DG account with the Vienna Philharmonic.

Cologne was also an important destination for the avant-garde, such as Stockhausen and Zimmermann. 'It's *the* orchestra of the city, so Gürzenich is a famous name, a family name, in Cologne. What I like very much is that I can experiment there because I have such a great trust in the orchestra and in the audience. I can explore different repertoires, different combinations, and propose something really ambitious which I think suits the mood of the city. We must be experimental there.'

Yet the orchestra with which Roth has dared to be most experimental is Les Siècles, the ensemble he formed back in 2003. Together they've made a huge impact on the classical music world. What were his founding principles for the orchestra's creation? 'At the beginning,' Roth explains, 'it was more to do with the repertoire – it was about having an orchestra that could change its shape, its style, and confront repertoire from different periods. But I also had in mind that I wanted to achieve the period-instrument aspect very quickly, so we started buying gut strings to test them out and then, progressively, moved on to woodwind and brass.'

And what colours Les Siècles paint! Their orient-themed programme was my highlight from the 2017 BBC Proms, a delicious travelogue from Saint-Saëns's *Egyptian* Piano Concerto No 5 to ballet music from Delibes's *Lakmé* and Lalo's *Namouna*, all performed with Gallic panache. The programme was Roth's chapeau to Brits such as Sir Thomas Beecham who championed this sort of repertoire when it was being neglected in France. Lemon-drop piquancy to the oboe, nutty woodwind flavours, cinnamon-infused exotic percussion: it was a feast for the musical gourmet, capped off with a pulsating, orgiastic Bacchanale from *Samson et Dalila*.

Roth's programming with Les Siècles is highly inventive. Who can forget their 2013 Prom which took the audience through the history of French dance, from Lully – Roth beating time with a staff (thankfully not sharing Lully's fate of striking himself on the foot, cause of the gangrene which killed the composer) – through to Stravinsky and an unforgettable account of *Le sacre du printemps*? In Paris in January, he imaginatively paired Debussy with Boulez's *Rituel in memoriam Bruno Maderna*, the programme preceded by a full gamelan introduction. How important is it for him to have that mix of 'ancient and modern'?

'When I started to conduct, I was a little frustrated – as a music lover, as a student and as a concert-goer – that I would hear the avant-garde, or the early Baroque, but only on very rare occasions could you experience these very different kinds of music in the same concert. Here at the

FRANÇOIS-XAVIER ROTH

Cité de la Musique, before the Philharmonie was built, I heard the Ensemble Intercontemporain with Boulez sharing a programme with Les Arts Florissants and Bill Christie. Still, it was not the same players playing everything – it was two very different specialist groups! The perspectives it gave me were fantastic, though. Why should it be forbidden to have in the same concert musics which may be far apart chronologically, but which perhaps say the same things or try to reach the same goals?’

It is this philosophy that guides Roth. ‘We spend a lot of time as musicians performing music which is already known by audiences; so how is it possible to propose a new perspective – for the listener to experience music they know already from different angles? I’m passionate about programming and it’s what is at the heart of Les Siècles. When we do a programme like the Boulez–Debussy, I imagine it says a lot about how I see Debussy and how I see Boulez. It would have been totally different if we had performed *Nocturnes* and *La mer* with a more conservative 20th-century composer. So a certain perspective is given to the audience.’

Roth and Les Siècles have already produced a superb recording of *La mer*, and they plan to continue their recorded Ravel survey from which the first release – a scintillating *Daphnis et Chloé* – won the Orchestral category at this year’s Gramophone Awards. Roth also has plans to mark the 150th anniversary of the death of Berlioz, not least regarding the location of the composer’s resting place. ‘Berlioz is still buried in Montmartre and I would love it if for this anniversary he could be moved to the Panthéon. I’m going to start a lobbying campaign!’ And in terms of repertoire, Roth and Les Siècles have just recorded *Les nuits d’été* (with baritone Stéphane Degout) and *Harold en Italie* (with viola player Tabea Zimmermann), due for release in January next year. But still he is impatient to explore new territories with this orchestra; his plans include extending the Beethoven in their repertoire and performing works such as the original, five-movement version of Mahler’s First Symphony. Schumann, Mendelssohn and Brahms also beckon, along with the Second Viennese School: ‘With the culture of this orchestra, I think this will be something very very special.’

At the start of this year, Roth’s focus returned to Debussy in the months leading up to the centenary of the composer’s death. At the Barbican, he conducted a three-concert series with the London Symphony Orchestra (in his role as newly



Recording Roth’s forthcoming Berlioz disc, with Stéphane Degout and Les Siècles

‘Considering what came before and after, Faune is not that provocative a piece – but it takes people by the hand to a new era’

destined for release on Harmonia Mundi, where it will be programmed with ... *Jeux* and *Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune*! Roth’s face creases into a smile and he giggles at the coincidence.

In concert, the biggest difference in *Nocturnes* came in ‘Sirènes’, the third movement. At the Barbican, Roth had the 60 ladies of the London Symphony Chorus, whose massed ululations, I’m afraid, lacked allure. At the Philharmonie he employed only 16 voices from the excellent Les Cris de Paris, split up and scattered among the orchestra, creating a mesmerising effect. *Faune* has been an important work for Roth, a former flautist, since his student days. ‘When I started to study it properly, I was at the Abbaye de Royaumont, close to Paris, where there is a big Debussy archive. There are so many different versions! As a performer, it’s a nightmare to know what Debussy wanted. *Faune* was a big success at its premiere but he was never happy with the final corrections in the score – he started to change things, to set precise tempi – so it’s difficult to decide what to do, how to conduct. Do you take his first gestures or his final views as an older composer?’

‘When you play *Faune*, you have the feeling that suddenly the space changes in the room – there are no limits any more in the architecture of the venue itself because of the harmonies and the sounds Debussy chooses. It is the beginning of modern music – the use of harmony where tonality is not fixed any more. It’s a prelude, but it’s nothing at all virtuoso or loud to open a concert. It’s subtle, an evocation, suggestive’ – without Mallarmé’s words being prescriptive, I add. ‘Exactly. When you

appointed principal guest conductor) which garnered critical plaudits. I saw the middle concert of the three, containing *Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune*, *Jeux* and *Nocturnes*, the first two of which were being set down for a 2023 release on LSO Live. And here we both were again, three days later in Paris, where Roth was preparing to perform *Nocturnes* once more, this time with Les Siècles,

FRANÇOIS-XAVIER ROTH

Cité de la Musique, before the Philharmonie was built, I heard the Ensemble Intercontemporain with Boulez sharing a programme with Les Arts Florissants and Bill Christie. Still, it was not the same players playing everything – it was two very different specialist groups! The perspectives it gave me were fantastic, though. Why should it be forbidden to have in the same concert musics which may be far apart chronologically, but which perhaps say the same things or try to reach the same goals?’

It is this philosophy that guides Roth. ‘We spend a lot of time as musicians performing music which is already known by audiences; so how is it possible to propose a new perspective – for the listener to experience music they know already from different angles? I’m passionate about programming and it’s what is at the heart of Les Siècles. When we do a programme like the Boulez–Debussy, I imagine it says a lot about how I see Debussy and how I see Boulez. It would have been totally different if we had performed *Nocturnes* and *La mer* with a more conservative 20th-century composer. So a certain perspective is given to the audience.’

Roth and Les Siècles have already produced a superb recording of *La mer*, and they plan to continue their recorded Ravel survey from which the first release – a scintillating *Daphnis et Chloé* – won the Orchestral category at this year’s Gramophone Awards. Roth also has plans to mark the 150th anniversary of the death of Berlioz, not least regarding the location of the composer’s resting place. ‘Berlioz is still buried in Montmartre and I would love it if for this anniversary he could be moved to the Panthéon. I’m going to start a lobbying campaign!’ And in terms of repertoire, Roth and Les Siècles have just recorded *Les nuits d’été* (with baritone Stéphane Degout) and *Harold en Italie* (with viola player Tabea Zimmermann), due for release in January next year. But still he is impatient to explore new territories with this orchestra; his plans include extending the Beethoven in their repertoire and performing works such as the original, five-movement version of Mahler’s First Symphony. Schumann, Mendelssohn and Brahms also beckon, along with the Second Viennese School: ‘With the culture of this orchestra, I think this will be something very very special.’

At the start of this year, Roth’s focus returned to Debussy in the months leading up to the centenary of the composer’s death. At the Barbican, he conducted a three-concert series with the London Symphony Orchestra (in his role as newly



Recording Roth’s forthcoming Berlioz disc, with Stéphane Degout and Les Siècles

‘Considering what came before and after, Faune is not that provocative a piece – but it takes people by the hand to a new era’

destined for release on Harmonia Mundi, where it will be programmed with ... *Jeux* and *Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune*! Roth’s face creases into a smile and he giggles at the coincidence.

In concert, the biggest difference in *Nocturnes* came in ‘Sirènes’, the third movement. At the Barbican, Roth had the 60 ladies of the London Symphony Chorus, whose massed ululations, I’m afraid, lacked allure. At the Philharmonie he employed only 16 voices from the excellent Les Cris de Paris, split up and scattered among the orchestra, creating a mesmerising effect. *Faune* has been an important work for Roth, a former flautist, since his student days. ‘When I started to study it properly, I was at the Abbaye de Royaumont, close to Paris, where there is a big Debussy archive. There are so many different versions! As a performer, it’s a nightmare to know what Debussy wanted. *Faune* was a big success at its premiere but he was never happy with the final corrections in the score – he started to change things, to set precise tempi – so it’s difficult to decide what to do, how to conduct. Do you take his first gestures or his final views as an older composer?’

‘When you play *Faune*, you have the feeling that suddenly the space changes in the room – there are no limits any more in the architecture of the venue itself because of the harmonies and the sounds Debussy chooses. It is the beginning of modern music – the use of harmony where tonality is not fixed any more. It’s a prelude, but it’s nothing at all virtuoso or loud to open a concert. It’s subtle, an evocation, suggestive’ – without Mallarmé’s words being prescriptive, I add. ‘Exactly. When you

appointed principal guest conductor) which garnered critical plaudits. I saw the middle concert of the three, containing *Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune*, *Jeux* and *Nocturnes*, the first two of which were being set down for a 2023 release on LSO Live. And here we both were again, three days later in Paris, where Roth was preparing to perform *Nocturnes* once more, this time with Les Siècles,